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ABSTRACT

The loosely coupled organizational approach is evaluated in this paper. This essay evaluates this line of research by focussing on an analysis of schools, which are usually considered to be the epitome of loosely structured organizations. It is argued that distinguishing the mode and degree of organizational coupling and control depends on where, by what criteria, and how one looks. Although this debunking perspective rejects rational and efficiency models of organization, it unwittingly reproduces many of the latter's assumptions of organizational behavior, which are exemplified by: (1) a near universal concern with instruction and measurement by standardized tests; (2) rational and efficiency-based evaluations; and (3) neglect of the underlying social organization of power. In particular, loose coupling analysts adopt a framework that precludes the discovery of both the degree and forms of organizational control within schools. By reexamining and reinterpreting the existing research on school organization, this paper identifies and illustrates a range of institutional mechanisms that constrain and control the work of teachers: direct, bureaucratic, and unobtrusive. The major drawback of the loose coupling framework is its underemphasis of the social organization and institutional character of organizations. (Contains 117 references.) (LMI)

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LOOSELY COUPLED ORGANIZATIONS REVISITED[1]

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ABSTRACT

Over the past two decades organizational analysts have become increasingly intrigued by those complex organizations which, despite appearing to be highly rationalized, paradoxically seem to lack expected levels of internal coordination and control of their productive activities and employees. The resulting body of research has popularized several new labels for such organizations - loosely coupled systems and organized anarchies.

This essay evaluates this line of research by focussing on its analysis of schools, which are usually considered to be the epitome of loosely structured organizations. In brief, I disagree with this perspective's conclusions and argue that distinguishing the mode and degree of organizational coupling and control depend on where, by what criteria and how one looks. My contention is that although this debunking perspective ostensibly rejects tidy rational and efficiency models of organization, ironically it unwittingly employs many of the latter's assumptions of organizational behavior. In particular, these analysts adopt, I argue, a framework that precludes the discovery of both the degree and forms of organizational control within schools.

Subsequently, by re-examining and re-interpreting the existing research on school organization, this paper identifies and illustrates a range of institutional and organizational mechanisms by which schools and the work of teachers are constrained and circumscribed.

Perhaps the concept most central to the study of organizations is rationality. Since the translation of Max Weber's famous studies of bureaucracy, research traditions both celebrating and debunking the theoretical and practical usefulness of organizational rationality have dominated the study of organizations. Over the past two decades, a number of organization theorists, representing a current manifestation of the debunking view, have focussed renewed interest on those organizations which, despite being structured as classic Weberian bureaucracies, appear not to be rational, purposeful systems. Such researchers have popularized a colorful vocabulary to describe such organizations: "garbage cans" and "organized anarchies," "decoupled organizations," and "loosely coupled systems."

This essay evaluates the resulting body of work - which I will refer to as the loose coupling perspective - by examining its analysis of the structure and features of educational organizations. Schools are a key case precisely because they are considered extreme in their degree of loose coupling and have been the focus of much of this research. Schools, these analysts have claimed, are characterized by unusually high levels of decentralization and disorganization and abnormally low levels of coordination, consensus and control. Although this view of educational systems has long been the conventional wisdom among organization theorists, there are, however, good reasons to re-assess its validity and the structure of school organizations.

Recently, researchers from the field of education have begun to popularize a completely different view of the organization of schools. Rather than decentralized and loosely controlled, this newer view finds schools to be the epitome of top-down, overly controlled, centralized bureaucracies. So far, this small but growing group has been largely concerned with school

reform and education policy. Its orientation is unabashedly humanistic and applied; it seeks to empower and professionalize teachers and restructure schools. However, as of yet, there has been little systematic critique or examination of the theory and methods of the older view of schools; the new view simply offers a different model. But it is necessary to look closely at what has been the prevailing view. Not only do many still accept its version of school organization, but it is deeply rooted in mainstream organization theory. By re-examining the case of schools, I seek to offer a critique of both the loose coupling perspective, in particular, and the study of organizational coupling and control, in general. For, if schools, long thought to be the epitome of loosely coupled systems, are in fact not, it suggests we need rethink and revisit the theory and method by which organization theorists have examined coupling and control in general.

Part 1 first lays out the intellectual roots of the loose coupling perspective. I explain how the study of educational organizations has come to be an important problem - an anomaly - in the interdisciplinarian field of organization theory. Part 2 begins my evaluation of the loose coupling perspective by turning to several key assumptions underlying this research. My argument is that distinguishing the mode and degree of organizational coupling and control depend on where, by what criteria and how one looks. In particular, these analysts adopt, I contend, a framework that impedes the discovery of both the degree and forms of organizational control in schools.

Part 3 of this paper offers an alternative view of the organizational structure of schools. My argument is grounded in existing empirical materials. I have not attempted a comprehensive analysis of the existing research on educational administration, the teaching occupation, nor the

organization of schooling, but have drawn from a range of materials concerned with all of these topics in order to illustrate the range of institutional and organizational mechanisms by which schools and the work of teachers are constrained.

In Part 4, I return to the larger paradigm underlying the loose coupling perspective. My contention is that although this debunking perspective ostensibly rejects tidy rational and efficiency models of organization, ironically, it unwittingly employs many of the latter's same fundamental notions of organizational behavior. I conclude that it is the resulting underembedded framework, which overlooks and underemphasizes the social organization and institutional character of organizations, that is responsible for the anomaly of loosely coupled organizations.

1. The Loose Coupling Perspective

Starting from Max Weber's classic analyses (1946, 1947), organization theorists have traditionally begun with the assumption that the rational organization is the most efficient and functional answer to those concerned with the problem of organizing large numbers of people in accomplishing large scale tasks. To Weber, bureaucracy is the modern embodiment of rationality - the creation of systems of impersonal rules and roles as the means to accomplish planned ends.

However, since its inception, the study of complex organizations has been characterized by a tension between theoretical and applied models emphasizing rationality, technical efficiency and functional coordination on the one hand, and the reality of life in organizations on the other. Many researchers and practitioners, rarely finding organizational realities to conform fully to the blueprint of formalized, specialized, standardized

structure, have lost confidence in both the explanatory power and the practical applicability of rational interpretations of the classic Weberian model. As a result, over the years organizational research has progressively emphasized the degree to which employees' sentiments, human relations, informal structures, dysfunctional attributes, uncertainties, contingencies, and environmental influences all work to limit organizational rationality (Zey-Ferrell and Aiken 1981; Pfeffer 1982; Scott 1987).

Approaches qualifying rational models reached an extreme in the 1970's with the ascendancy of post-rational organization theories using the vocabulary of loose coupling to describe this tension. This perspective's roots lie in the work of several varied streams of research: garbage can theory (Cohen et al. 1972; March and Olsen 1976); institutional theory (Meyer and Rowan 1977, 1978; Meyer et al. 1978; Rowan 1982; Meyer and Scott 1983; Meyer 1984); and the organizational social psychology of Weick (1976, 1979, 1984). In order to elucidate the theoretical assumptions underlying the loose coupling perspective, I will briefly review these three major intellectual roots.

A.) Organizations as Organized Anarchies

Organized anarchy and garbage can theory was the first major explication of the loose coupling perspective. These ideas were a logical extension of March and Simon's (1958; Simon 1957) earlier work on the boundedness to rationality in organizational decision making and Cyert and March's (1963) work on the pluralistic character of organizational order.

The strength of this view lies in the ability to draw attention to the indeterminacy and anarchy of decision-making processes, at the core of organizations. For instance, March and Olsen argue that in reality

"individuals find themselves in a more complex, less stable and less understood world than that described by standard theories of organizational choice. They are placed in a world over which they often have only modest control" (March and Olsen 1976, p. 21). Such theorists have found this non-rationality to be especially true in organizations, such as schools and universities, which appear to have unclear and little understood methods or technologies, inconsistent and fluid participation by actors and ambiguous or uncertain goals. Under such conditions, decision-making mechanisms become analogous to garbage cans, wherein rules, plans, goals, solutions, interests and actors are incoherently mixed and matched. Research in this tradition provides insightful descriptions of organizations in which choices come before plans; where major decisions are made without due concern; where participants fight over even minor decisions but then ignore their implementation; where methods are disconnected from outcomes; and where decisions seem to result from serendipitous encounters. Rationality here is not simply constrained by human limitations but becomes an after-the-fact reconstruction to organize and manage an impression of orderliness which, in fact, does not exist.

B.) Organizations as Loosely Coupled Systems

A second source of development of the loose coupling perspective is the organizational social psychology of Weick (1976, 1979, 1984). It was Weick's work that popularized the vocabulary of organizations as loosely coupled systems. In his view, these are organizations and systems composed of autonomous elements that are often unresponsive to one another, rather than rationally and hierarchically controlled. Loose coupling comes in a number of forms, according to Weick, including the absence of regulations, the failure of superordinates to influence subordinates, decentralization of power leading

to employee autonomy, disconnections of structures from tasks, planned unresponsiveness and a lack of goal consensus. In his view, again, schools, in particular, are characterized by such ambiguities and uncertainties supposedly found to a lesser extent in traditional production and business organizations. These characteristics arise from confusion surrounding the technology of teaching: how learning actually happens, the difficulties of predicting and measuring educational outcomes, and the changing influence of curricular and methodological innovations.

These two streams of research and theory have been concerned with how to make sense of the micro-processes of organizational decision making and the role of management under conditions of ambiguity. However, they do not question the conventional role of organizational coordination and control, which while ever more complex and elusive, are still assumed extant, necessary and functional.

Nevertheless, the implications of such views bring the above-mentioned rationality tension within organization theory to a head and suggest several critical questions: If the formal properties of organizations, and the bureaucratic mechanisms described by Weber, do not function as means of coordination, what is their purpose? Furthermore, if organizations are uncoordinated and uncontrolled, how are organizational and social order achieved? How do organizations remain stable and why do they generally look alike? Alternatively, if the formal properties are mechanisms of control, but terribly inefficient, why do they continue to exist? Why are most organizations, whether private or public, large or small, organized bureaucratically? Why has Weber's prediction of the growth of rationalization and its embodiment in bureaucratization come true? Such fundamental questions

lie at the heart of organization theory.

C.) Organizations as Institutions

A third major source of development of the loose coupling perspective - institutional theory - constructs another alternative to conventional organizational models as an answer to these questions (Meyer and Scott 1983; Meyer et al. 1978; Meyer and Rowan 1977,1978; Rowan 1982; Meyer 1984).[1] Institutional theory, while a distinctly different approach to organizational analysis from that of Weick and Cohen et al., shares their emphasis on loose coupling and is, to a large extent, an explanation of it. Its contribution has been to transcend traditional task-oriented explanations of organizations and resurrect and reconstruct Selznick's (1949) notion of institutionalization as the source of organization structure.

In this view, rather than coordination and control of task, activity and exchange, the surrounding macro-level societal order is the source of organizational features. Institutionalists argue that organizational structure is the institutionalization of societal myths, lore, ideologies and norms as to what particular organizations should be.

The image conveyed by institutional theories is one of form over substance - a Goffmanesque (1959) presentation of engineered impressions, but at the level of organizational structure. This structural conformity is far more important than what actually transpires inside organizations because "organizations that do so increase their legitimacy and their survival prospects, independent of the immediate efficacy of the acquired practices and

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1. Institutional theory is not one theory but rather several theories and approaches that are not entirely consistent or cohesive. For recent reviews of this genre see Zucker (1987, 1988) and Scott (1988). Here, I will focus on that branch associated with the work of Scott, Meyer, Rowan and their associates.

procedures" (Meyer and Scott 1983, p. 21).

Institutionalists argue that because structure is tightly coupled with the environment, internal productive activity must, in turn, necessarily be decoupled from organizational structure. As a result, such organizations divide into two levels: tight coupling at the interorganizational level causes loose coupling at the intraorganizational level. Organizations decouple, that is, intentionally neglect to adequately control their work processes for several reasons. It serves to mask inconsistencies, irrationalities and inefficiencies - in short poor performance - which might undermine public faith in the organization. It generates satisfaction and commitment on the part of employees and finally, it allows local input into organizational processes without disrupting outward institutional conformity. Hence, in their view, loose coupling is both inevitable and inefficient, both functional and dysfunctional.

D.) The Anomaly of Educational Organizations

The ideas and work of the above streams of thought have generated a great deal of interest in the sources, forms and variations of order in organizations. The resulting body of research is highly varied - focussing on different types of organizations (private, public, non-profit), different levels of analysis (interorganizational, intraorganizational), different units of analysis (individuals, organizations, populations) and different types of linkages (control, communication, consensus, cohesion, coordination). In addition, among the various proponents of the loose coupling thesis, there are a large number of differences in the usage and definition of the concept itself. Weick (1976) alone lists fifteen forms that loose coupling may assume.

Despite the wide range of uses to which the ideas of loose coupling have been put, there is, nevertheless, common ground: the insightful emphasis on the degree to which organizations which appear to be rational are, in fact, not. More specifically, it is possible to distinguish several characteristics commonly used to define loosely coupled organizations:

1. unclear, diverse or ambiguous organizational means and goals.
2. low levels of coordination of employees' productive activities.
3. low levels of organizational control:
   - -high levels of employee autonomy.
   - -low levels of managerial authority.

Loosely coupled organizations, then, are those that exhibit an inordinate lack of cohesion and integration. But, it is power - the ability of one actor to control or influence another - which lies at the crux of the loose coupling concept and which is thus the central to my analysis. Indeed, Aldrich, summarizing research on organizational coupling, notes that, "the major determinant of coupling [is] the degree of hierarchical control by a central authority," (1978, p. 52). As a result, empirical research on organizational coupling typically focusses on the degree of centralized control or decentralized delegation in organizations.

Although these post-rationalists generalize to other types of organizations, their focus has largely been on the service and public sectors. Moreover, this perspective has given educational organizations, and public elementary and secondary schools in particular, a central place; it deems schools the archetypal loosely coupled systems (Weick 1976; Meyer and Scott

1983). As a result, this image of schools has become the conventional wisdom in the field of organization theory (Corwin 1981; Tyler 1988).

To educationists, the notion that educational organizations are unusual bureaucracies is not new. Since Dewey (1902) and the later field studies of Waller (1932) and Becker (1953), researchers from the field of education have consistently found teachers' work to be inherently incompatible with formal bureaucratization. But it was Bidwell (1965) who embedded this tension in a theoretical framework that laid the foundation of thinking on school organization for several decades, including that of the loose coupling perspective. In his formulation, schools are a theoretically significant case of bureaucratic organization precisely because of their "structural looseness." Their unique technology (affective, non-tangible, fluid) and clientele (non-voluntary and as-yet unsocialized) place limits on the bureaucratization and rationalization of teachers' work.

Among the most prominent empirical work supporting this view has been that of Lortie (1969, 1973, 1975, 1977). He argued that teaching is "least controlled by specific and literally enforced rules and regulations," and "compared to other systems of work, schools still provide considerable occasion for the exercise of personal discretion by classroom teachers" (1969, p. 14; 1977, p. 30). As a result, he concluded that "self-contained classrooms are small universes of control with the teacher in command; administrators refer, ambivalently, to the 'closed door' which the teacher can put between herself and administrative surveillance" (1969, p.9).

Thus, it is no coincidence that the current loose coupling perspective largely developed out of research in educational organizations. The latter have long been unexplained Kuhnian anomalies for the rational paradigm. In

fact, Ouchi and Wilkins, in their review of organizational culture analysis, go so far as to claim that, "It was the resistance of school systems to bureaucratic interpretation that brought to an end the study of formal organization structure" (1985, p. 467). It is for these reasons that the loose coupling perspective is best evaluated using the case of schools. And, there are good reasons to undertake such a re-evaluation.

Recently, researchers from the field of education have begun to popularize a very different view of the organization of schools.[2] Like previous research on school organization, this line of analysis begins with the assumption that education and bureaucratization are fundamentally incompatible. However, rather than finding the resulting problem to be organizational looseness and decentralization, they argue that bureaucratization has produced an overly centralized system with factory-like working conditions. In particular, they find that teachers have too little influence over important school decisions and issues. Such disempowerment and deprofessionalization results, they show, in serious organizational problems, including dissatisfaction, stress and loss of commitment among faculties. With the looming threat of a national teacher shortage and alarming attrition and turnover rates (Rollefson 1990; Darling-Hammond 1987), this new view has picked up steam. So far, this newer view has been largely concerned with school reform and education policy. It seeks to "restructure" schools by increasing "teacher empowerment" through "school-based management." There has been little systematic critique or examination of the theory and methods of

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2. Among the most prominent work in this vein to date is that of Darling-Hammond and Wise (1985); Conley and Cooper (1991); Corcoran et al. (1988), Rosenholtz (1989), Sergiovanni and Moore (1989); Bacharach et al. (1988, 1990), and Shedd and Bacharach (1991).

the older view of schools; the new view simply offers a different model. It is to such an examination that I now turn.

2. The Underlying Assumptions of the Loose Coupling Perspective

I begin my evaluation of the loose coupling perspective by examining several key assumptions underlying this research. My argument, developed below, is that the assessment of organizational coupling and control are highly dependent on where, by what criteria and how one examines them. It is my contention that research subscribing to the loose coupling perspective rests on a set of overlapping assumptions that impede the discovery of both the degree and forms of control and coupling within schools.

A. The Goal of Schools

When it comes to analyzing organizations, researchers must, of course, first determine the key functions and goals of an organization, prior to analyzing how they are organized and with what success. When it comes to schools, researchers traditionally have divided school activities into two zones: educational activities within classrooms and administrative support functions out of classrooms (e.g. Lortie 1969; Meyer and Rowan 1983). One of the key assumptions underlying the loose coupling perspective is that the crucial educational activity, the essence of the work of teachers and the primary function and goal of schools is classroom instruction.

The classroom/school dichotomy is not unfamiliar; it is an adaptation of a traditional framework in organizational analysis that divides organizations into technical and managerial systems. Perhaps first formalized by Parsons (1960), this model of organizational life assumes a functional separation between productive activities in the "technical core" and administrative activities in the "managerial structure" of organizations. This traditional

theoretical framework mirrors the industrial or business unionism model of collective bargaining which came of age with the New Deal (Kochan et al. 1986; Lipset, Trow and Coleman 1956). In this model, both employers and employees agree that organizational policy, overall strategy and administrative decisions are the responsibility of management. Hence, the scope of legitimate employee input, bargaining and grievance is limited to "bread and butter" issues, working conditions, job security, and activity within the technical core. The "contested terrain" becomes the definition of "a fair day's pay for a fair day's work" (Edwards 1979). In this context, Barnard (1938) aptly described everything not directly affecting employees' work-a-day lives as their "zone of indifference."

In the realm of education, both practitioners (Johnson 1984; Corcoran et al. 1988) and researchers (Conley 1991; Tyler 1988) alike have adopted this model. These groups equate the managerial zone with school-wide coordination, planning and resource allocation activities. In turn, they equate the technical and productive core with the educational activities of schools. When it comes to operationalizing the latter concept, although most researchers note that schools have a wide range of functions and goals, they, understandably enough, typically assume classroom instruction to be the primary educational activity of schools and the essence of the work of teachers.

Hence, when these researchers analyze how loose or tight and how centralized or decentralized schools are, they commonly ask, how much discretion do teachers have, or alternatively, how much control do administrators have over instructional matters within classrooms? For the loose coupling perspective, lack of control revolves around this focus on

instruction and the difficulties of rationalizing such an activity. Furthermore, whether they presume the ambiguities of such interactional work are potentially tractable or not, loose coupling analysts conclude that schools make few attempts to find out. The result of this decoupling is that schools perform inefficiently in regard to their primary task of instruction. As Meyer, Scott and Deal put it: "Thus, the standard social science portrait of schools depicts weak and ineffective organizations with little internal rationalization of work, and little capacity to produce useful effects as measured by student performance" (1983, p. 48).

One problem with this line of analysis of schools is that it accepts without question the necessity of the classroom/school division of labor in schools. However, one cannot assume that an organization's administrative, distributive and strategic decisions are simply supportive and housekeeping activities, best left to administrators. The one-sidedness of this traditional focus is illustrated by comparison to the alternative focus adopted by newer educational research promoting teacher empowerment.

This newer reform view also adopts the traditional classroom/school, core/structure dichotomy, and also holds that inefficiency arises from the organizational structure of schools. But, this reform view does not assume that a division of labor in which teachers instruct and principals manage is functional and necessary. In contrast, when analyzing how centralized or decentralized schools are, they ask, how much say do teachers have or, alternatively, how much control do administrators have over school-wide matters outside of classrooms? They find very little teacher control and much administrative discretion over policy, resource allocation and planning and have concluded that schools are overly centralized (e.g. Rosenholtz 1989;

Bacharach et al. 1988; Conley and Cooper 1991; Shedd and Bacharach 1991). In their view, the source of many school problems lies in teachers' relative lack of input into the managerial zone, rather than in the lack of administrative control over the instructional zone. Their conclusion is explicitly prescriptive: schools should "involve teachers more fully in decision-making processes" (Bacharach et al. 1988, p. 163).

The different foci of the two views arise from the different theoretical persuasions of each perspective. One emphasizes managerial needs for control; the other emphasizes employee needs for input. But notably, both agree on the existing division of labor within schools: "Schools are marked by a 'traditional influence pattern' in which decisions are differentiated by locale and position...administrators make strategic decisions outside of classrooms and teachers make operational decisions inside of classrooms" (Conley 1991, pp. 237-8; see Figure 1). Moreover, and the central point here, is that despite opposing viewpoints, almost all researchers begin with the initial assumption that classroom instruction is the primary educational function of schools. Such striking agreement from otherwise diverse viewpoints suggests the validity of this view of the division of labor within schools.

Figure 1

Conventional View of the Division of Labor within Schools

Zones	Distribution of Labor
Instruction Within-the-Classroom Zone (Technical Core)	Controlled by Teachers
Allocation and Coordination School-wide Zone (Managerial Structure)	Controlled by Administrators

There is, however, a very significant problem with this shared wisdom - its initial assumption is inconsistent with the findings of most sociological studies of education.

Beginning with Durkheim (1925), continuing through Parsons (1959) and related functionalist theorists of education (e.g. Henry 1965; Dreeben 1968), and up to current revisionist and critical analysts of schools (e.g. Katz 1972; Bowles and Gintis 1976), investigators have viewed the major purpose of educational organizations to lie in their social and institutional functions. Indeed, many have argued that with the diminution of the family's role in society, schools have increasingly taken on social tasks once solely reserved for parents, churches and communities (e.g. Coleman and Hoffer 1987). That is, the most important task of schools is the passing on of society's social order to the next generation. This involves two overlapping activities. The first is socialization or the inculcation of societal norms, beliefs and roles - what Durkheim referred to as the moral order and the collective conscience. The second is differentiation or the reproduction of a society's patterns of horizontal and vertical stratification. Commonly referred to as tracking, students are, throughout their school careers, systematically tested, evaluated, classified, sorted and credentialed in accordance with normative criteria. This sorting process directs students towards future social, occupational, status and class categories.

By underemphasizing such social functions of schools, and equating teachers' work with classroom instruction, researchers have not directly specified nor examined the organization of all the most important educational tasks transpiring within schools and classrooms. Indeed, any autonomy and looseness around instructional matters may be because that sample of

activities does not represent the most crucial or important tasks of schools. Hence, when it comes to analyzing the organization and performance of teachers' work, many researchers may be looking in the wrong place.

B. The Organizational Structure of Schools

Along with choosing an appropriate focus, a second issue for organizational analysts is that of deciding the criteria by which they will evaluate a given type of organization. Organizational looseness, coupling, control and decentralization are, it must be remembered, relative concepts and the question must always be posed - compared to what? In the loose coupling perspective the point of comparison is, of course, the rational organization. A second key assumption underlying the loose coupling perspective is that this traditional ideal is the paragon of organizational control and the appropriate standard by which to evaluate the structure of schools.

The rational organization exhibits standardization, specialization, formalization and, of foremost importance, control. The prototype of this traditional ideal is the bureaucracy, its clearest embodiment is the modern production factory and its guiding image is the machine (Scott 1987). Non-rationality and de-bureaucratization are deviations from this state of affairs. Schools are a key example of such deviation; they not only do not fit the classic rational bureaucratic ideal, but they are deemed the epitome of the non-rational, de-bureaucratized, decoupled organization.

One problem with this comparison is that it accepts without question the validity of this standard. That is, the loose coupling perspective has failed to first ask if factories and by implication, factory workers are the appropriate criteria by which to judge schools and teachers.

It is important to take care in choosing one's standards of comparison

because they tend to shape one's results. In this case, the comparison does so by blurring the distinction between formal and substantive rationality. Formal rationality has to do with how routinized and bureaucratized an organization is. Substantive rationality is concerned with how sensible and valuable a form is. Weber himself stressed that regardless of the degree of formal rationality, whether observers find organizations to be characterized by substantive rationality depends on what values and standards they hold (Weber 1947, pp. 185,215). That is, how bureaucratized an organization is and how bureaucratized it should be are two separate issues. The former is descriptive; the latter prescriptive.

In accepting the rational organization as its reference point, the loose coupling approach understates the implications of multiple constituencies, criteria and interests for the definition of appropriate school organization. With a plurality of functions and interested parties, the question of how schools should be structured and how they should be assessed are value-laden issues (cf. Cameron and Whetten 1983; Kanter 1981).

A close look at the loose coupling perspective indicates the dominance of managerial criteria. Looseness, in this perspective, is not a lack of social order altogether, but a lack of centralized control. Hence, when Weick describes loose coupling as disconnection "between headquarters and the field" (1984, p. 397), he is referring to the control of teachers by administrators, not vice versa. The underlying assumption here is that hierarchy is functional and proper. This overlooks the possibilities of non-hierarchical modes of organization. After all, that organizations do not exhibit the characteristics of the machine model, does not mean that they lack order, coordination or purpose.

The extent to which the criteria adopted by the loose coupling perspective are implicitly value laden is illustrated by comparison to the alternative focus adopted by newer educational research focussing on teacher disempowerment. This view does not assume bureaucratic hierarchy to be functional, necessary nor inevitable. Rather than comparing schools to the machine model, the new view compares schools to another traditional ideal - the professional model of organization. In this view: "Teachers are not (but ought to be) treated as professionals; schools are (and ought not to be) top-heavy bureaucracies; and no significant improvements can occur in America's systems of public education unless schools are fundamentally restructured (Shedd and Bacharach 1991, p. 1).

Figure 2

The Comparison of Schools with Other Organizations

Type of Organization	Distribution of Power
Loose Coupling Perspective	
Rational Bureaucracy	Centralized
Educational Organization	Decentralized
Disempowerment Perspective	
Professional Organization	Decentralized
Educational Bureaucracy	Centralized

In essence, each of these two views assumes a relationship between two variables: type of organization and their degree of centralized control. The type of organization, however, to which schools are compared varies. As with their differing foci concerning the division of labor in schools, one

emphasizes managerial needs for control; the other emphasizes employee needs for autonomy and input. As Figure 2 shows, each viewpoint comes to opposite conclusions concerning how schools stand. Given their different assumptions, both viewpoints may well be correct. However, actually empirically testing either of these comparisons is difficult. In fact, school researchers rarely do so - their comparison organizations are largely hypothetical ideals of professionals or proletarians. This is understandable. Such data are rarely available and in general, cross-organizational or cross-occupational comparisons are inherently difficult because many decisions are not comparable and questionnaires cannot be kept consistent (Simpson 1985). It would be very difficult, for instance, to compare how much power lawyers have within legal firms, and factory workers have within plants with what teachers have within schools. The problem, however, is that, in order to conduct plausible analyses of organization it is necessary to separate the researcher's own underlying theoretical persuasion - their definition of what is proper - from their assessment of what is. That is, one's criteria may bias one's results.

Along with the dilemma of determining the criteria by which one evaluates an organization, there is also, a second problem with these comparisons - the initial assumption that rational bureaucracy is synonymous with centralization and, in turn, that the lack of rational bureaucracy is synonymous with decentralization. This traditional dichotomy, like that between loose and tight, is a misleading oversimplification.

Bureaucracy is only one mode of many by which groups of individuals may be organized in the pursuit of larger goals and tasks. Rational bureaucracies are indeed centrally controlled organizations, but the latter are not always

rational bureaucracies. Weber himself described two other modes of centralized organizational control: that based on personal loyalty to a leader and that based on traditional customs. What distinguishes the bureaucratic mode is formal rationality. That is, bureaucracy replaces obedience to individuals or traditions with obedience to impersonal rules and roles. By no means, can it be assumed that bureaucracy is the most controlled or centralized of settings. Nor can it be assumed that the absence of bureaucracy in organizations is synonymous with employee autonomy and organizational decentralization.

For instance, researchers invariably make the mistake of associating de-bureaucratization with a paucity of rules and regulations for teachers or with the extent to which teachers may be able to bypass rules and regulations. But, it is important to remember that pockets of non-rationalization and de-bureaucratization are not limited to subordinates. Administrators and superordinates may also be subject to too few rules, inadequate accountability or enjoy wide autonomy. Or they may also be able to evade, ignore or resist the rules that do exist - with consequences for employee control. Indeed, a lack of or the skirting of standardized, authorized regulations, could be a source of administrative power and organizational centralized control rather than the opposite.

Indeed, loose coupling researchers view any kind of regulation on administrative prerogatives as an impediment to organizational control - almost as if rules for managers were a wrong use of bureaucratic rationality. For example, school researchers typically point out that the standardization of teachers' salaries, promotions and tenure all lessen teachers' dependency on superordinates and thus undermine their loyalty and obedience to school

administrators (e.g. Lortie 1969, 1975). But this misses what this kind of rationalization, so fundamental to bureaucracy in general, does provide - the loyalty and obedience of employees to the organization.

Weber stated this clearly: "Entrance into an office...is considered an acceptance of a specific obligation of faithful management in return for a secure existence. It is decisive for the specific nature of modern loyalty to an office that ... it does not establish a relationship to a person" (Weber 1946, p. 199). "Where legal guarantees against arbitrary dismissal...are developed, they merely serve to guarantee a strictly objective discharge of office duties free from all personal considerations" (Weber 1946, p. 202). Thus, in bureaucracy employees exchange loyalty for security. Limitations on superordinate prerogatives are not a form of decentralization, but are a different, and ingenious, form of centralized control.

In sum, in order to come to satisfactory conclusions about the nature of school organizational structure it is important to move beyond comparisons based on simplified and value-laden dichotomies, such as loose/tight, coupled/decoupled, bureaucratic/non-bureaucratic, or rational/non-rational. It is necessary to first develop a sound theoretically-based comparison point, make this explicit and then utilize it in systematic empirical comparisons.

C. The Assessment of Power and Control in Schools

Along with choosing an appropriate focus and deciding the criteria by which they will evaluate an organization, a third issue for analysts of control in organizations is deciding how to actually assess this variable. Students of power have long noted the difficulties in adequately conceptualizing and measuring the social and institutional organization of power and control (e.g. Lukes 1974; Gaventa 1980; Pfeffer 1981; Frey 1971,

1985; Hartsock 1985). A third assumption of the loose coupling perspective is that organizational control in schools can be adequately assessed by examining visible and direct means of administrative influence and employee accountability.

Typical of this approach is the influential work of the institutionalists. Using survey data, the institutionalists primarily looked at three means by which school organizations control the work of teachers: the existence of detailed school policies, administrative inspection of teachers at work and the administrative use of students' examination scores as an output measure of teachers (e.g. Meyer and Scott 1983, pp. 50-1,57,74,84). They found that "schools develop few policies in the areas of greatest significance for their central goals and purposes" (1983, p. 58). Moreover, they also found little follow up for those policies that do exist: "Neither teaching nor its output in student socialization is subject to serious organizational evaluation and inspection" (1983, p.74; and Dornbusch and Scott 1975). Finally, even if there were rules and even if they were monitored for compliance, such control would not be possible, they conclude, because school administrators' "authority to carry out these activities is in fact evanescent" (1983, p.75).

The problem with this approach is that it ignores a whole range of alternative forms by which power and control may operate in organizations (cf. Simpson 1985; Edwards 1979; Pfeffer 1981).

Perrow (1986), for instance, has persuasively argued that far more effective than direct controls, such as rules, regulations and sanctions in organizations, are bureaucratic controls, wherein the range of behavior and responsibility is restricted by specialization, standardization, and

formalization. This is the role of the division of labor.

The division of labor subdivides organizational decision making and tasks into a series of steps. These steps are sequential, that is, some steps are more fundamental and important than others and some decisions temporally come after others and are nested within their predecessors. Different steps of differing importance are delegated to different employee and role groups within an organization. The result is a hierarchical structure of circumscribed roles. Hence, the division of labor is, at heart, a division of power - it is fundamentally hierarchical. By definition, it limits the areas in which members have responsibility and authority and is thus a potential means of both organizational coordination and control. It follows that one can assess organizational centralization by the degree to which important steps, tasks and decisions are delegated downward among employees or concentrated upward among managers.

Besides bureaucratic controls, Perrow also suggests the crucial importance of unobtrusive organizational controls, in which underlying cognitive premises are set through norms, expectations and precedents. In order to assess the existence and effectiveness of this form of control it is necessary to examine the "non-decisions" taken for granted by participants and researchers alike, and the occupational and organizational culture of schools.

In both of these less-direct forms of control an apparent autonomy and independence of employees may exist precisely <u>because</u> of the centralization of the power of employers. As a result, the absence of obvious controls may be an indicator of the efficacy of these other mechanisms, not of looseness. An adequate analysis of control in schools must therefore examine a wide range of possible mechanisms both direct and indirect, formal and informal prior to

making conclusions concerning the degree of control.

In sum, the objective of the foregoing section has been to show that assessments of organizational coupling and control are highly dependent on where, by what criteria and how one examines them. It has been my contention that research subscribing to the loose coupling perspective rests on a series of assumptions that impede the discovery of the forms and degree of control and coupling within schools. This suggests that the conclusion that schools are loosely coupled is premature and that we must rethink these underlying assumptions if we are to improve our understanding of the organizational structure of schools. Specifically, it is necessary to examine the organization of all the key functions and goals of schools, to move beyond oversimplified notions of loose/tight, bureaucratic/non-bureaucratic and coupled/decoupled and to examine a wide range of forms by which employee control might be obtained. To do this I now turn to a re-examination and re-interpretation of research on the organizational structure of schools. My discussion is necessarily selective, concentrating on studies, both old and new, which illustrate the three general types of organizational control suggested by Perrow.

3. Forms of Control in Schools

A. Direct Controls

Among the most obvious and direct means of controlling and directing the behavior of employees is through the use of rules, regulations, supervision and sanctions. Although loose coupling research holds that teachers' work in schools as free of such constraints, there is substantial evidence to the contrary.

For instance, re-examination of the institutionalists' own data indicates that a large percentage of teachers and administrators cite the existence of many detailed policies and regulations for school activities. The institutionalists solely focus on the domain of classroom instruction and, they stress that school staffs do, indeed, report far fewer detailed policies for the regulation of such issues (Meyer and Scott 1983, pp 50-1). But what the institutionalists overlook is that the issues most explicitly regulated fall within the all important non-instructional domains of socialization, behavior inculcation, student evaluation, tracking and resource allocation. Even classroom instruction, however, is not necessarily an arena of teacher autonomy. A number of studies have shown the growing and widespread use of formal curricular controls; teachers are issued guides outlining course objectives and topics, standardized texts and matching tests. The most intrusive examples of this form of rationalization are the increasingly used "teacher proof" curricular programs. In order to insure uniformity, these pre-packaged programs specify in detail sequential "performance objectives" for students, techniques for teachers and referenced tests as output controls (e.g. Goodlad 1984; Fuhrman et al. 1988; Floden et al. 1988).

Rules, as long noted in the literature on organizational control, are only as effective as their implementation. That is, they must be monitored and enforced. Although it is clear that there are, in fact, regulations for teachers, the evidence is quite mixed as to how often and with what degree of success teacher compliance is obtained. Teachers are formally supervised and evaluated but this is often infrequent and inconsistent (Wise et al. 1985). Floden et al. (1988) found, for instance, that in many settings teachers are neither rewarded nor punished for following district rules concerning

instruction. On the other hand, others have reported that teachers' practices are significantly impacted and circumscribed by the use of state or district standardized tests as output measures (Rosenholtz 1985, 1989; Darling-Hammond and Wise 1985).

But, what most research, including that of the loose coupling perspective, overlooks are the less formal, less rationalized means by which administrators can exert pressure on faculties. Analysts of power in organizations have shown how individuals may be able to accrue power or autonomy disproportionate to their official organizational role, if they are able to control important resources or sources of uncertainty and dependency (Crozier 1964; Perrow 1986: Kanter 1977; Pfeffer and Salancik 1978). The basis of power in resource dependency means that among the most significant determinants of member compliance are the organization's range of inducements, rewards and punishments. Hence, administrators who control these, either legitimately or not, have an important means of controlling employees. There is evidence to suggest that schools are no exception.

Data on the distribution of decision-making power in schools suggest that school administrators do indeed have a number of key levers with which to control teachers. For instance, most teachers and administrators report school principals to have substantially greater influence than others, over key resources in the school: budgets, materials, students, communications, space, and time. Likewise, most perceive principals to have greater influence over policy and administrative decisions: staff hiring and firing, overall curricular design, student discipline codes, building arrangements and school schedule (e.g. Bacharach et al. 1988; Corcoran et al. 1988; Firestone 1985; Conley 1991).

It is precisely because of this concentration of decision-making power that administrators are provided with an array of levers with which to control staff behavior: the assignment of rooms, distribution of classroom resources, assignment of courses to teachers, allocation of types and quality of students, distribution of non-teaching duties, determination of class sizes, control of special funding and clearance for field trips, projects or conferences and, ultimately, firing.

For example, the literature on school life has long noted a key area of vulnerability of the teacher to administrative power arises because of the limited disciplinary authority of teachers. As a result, teachers depend on being "backed up" in discipline problems with students or against angry parents (Waller 1932; Bidwell 1965; Becker 1953; McPherson 1972; Willis 1977). Numerous studies, both journalistic and sociological, attest to the consequences when teachers do not comply with the existing school order and are not backed up. For instance, Herndon (1968, 1971) and Kozol (1967) both write revealingly of their experiences trying to implement unconventional and open classrooms in the 1960's. Both faced escalating overt and coercive pressures to cease their nonconformity.

In sum, there is a range of evidence suggesting that, in fact, there are direct, obtrusive and coercive controls of teachers' activities within schools. Nevertheless, even if the loose coupling perspective has under-emphasized the extent of such mechanisms, establishing the existence of rules and enforcement is not sufficient to substantiate that intraorganizational control is achieved in schools. Analysts of organizational control tell us that direct controls tend to be less efficacious and less efficient and their use in organizations is more likely associated with chronic lack of

compliance, situations of crisis or ultimately open conflict (Perrow 1986, pp. 128-131; Ouchi 1977; Gaventa 1980). Especially, coercive measures may generate resistance, require frequent supervision and can be vulnerable to circumvention "behind the closed doors of the classroom." Because of such limitations, the question arises: are there more comprehensive and more effective means to organize in control and organize out challenge, shirking or non-compliance in schools?

B. Bureaucratic Controls

Less direct than rules is bureaucratic control - the hierarchy of standardized, specialized and formalized roles, which, by definition, is supposed to circumscribe the areas in which organization members have responsibility and authority. Thus, in order to determine whether schools are or are not controlled organizations, a second place to look is at the division of labor between administrators and teachers. Although loose coupling research holds that the division of labor within schools is a source of decentralization, autonomy, independence and decoupling, there is evidence to the contrary.

For example, extensive data on the distribution of school decision-making show that the only domain into which teachers have substantial input is that of classroom instruction (e.g. Firestone 1985; Corcoran et al. 1988; Bacharach et al. 1988; Conley 1991). Especially noteworthy is the data indicating that teachers have little influence over the all important non-instructional functions of socialization and sorting within classrooms.

For instance, while the policing of classroom and school-wide behavior, values and morals is usually considered the teachers' responsibility, the majority of teachers report they have little say over the substance of such

issues (Corcoran et al. 1988). A pertinent example is the taboo of critical or frank discussion of basic morals and norms, especially those concerning sexuality, religion and political ideology (Ziegler and Peak 1970). Use of one's first name with students is usually disallowed. Until recently, often teachers' dress and appearance were also not up to their own discretion (McPherson 1972).

However, even within what is considered the primary realm of teachers' responsibility and competence - the content and methods of classroom instruction - there are overlooked constraints. Contrary to their implicit portrayal in survey questionnaires, we cannot assume that decisions concerning classroom and school issues are either equal or independent events. The loose coupling perspective has not examined the degree to which higher-order decisions, over which teachers have little influence, subtly circumscribe classroom activity and thus provide intraorganizational control.

For instance, there is little question that the number, abilities and characteristics of students a teacher is assigned, decisions made by the administration, shape the instructional strategies teachers use (Filby et al. 1980). The issue of who one teaches is important; teachers rarely have the right to not teach particular students, such as those who are disruptive (McPherson 1972). As such, teachers do not have the equivalent of management's right to hire and fire or of a professional's right to pick and choose clientele. This has important implications for issues of discipline, because it removes the most fundamental source of leverage and power that teachers may use against students - exclusion. As a result, students who do not voluntarily submit to the teacher's procedures and directives must be referred to the building administration which, by definition, holds greater

power with which to coerce (Waller 1932; Becker 1953; Willis 1977).

Besides directly effecting teachers' practices, as described previously, prescribed curricula, standardized course tests, and school grading policies also indirectly set the parameters for what teachers do, shape their thinking as to their role, and define the goals of instruction and education (McNeil 1988; Gamoran and Dreeben 1986; Bullough et al. 1984; Darling-Hammond and Wise 1985).

Teachers' classroom autonomy is further constrained by the assignment of courses. It is common for teachers to have little discretion over what courses they teach (e.g. Firestone 1985). This suggests that teachers can be required to teach subjects they feel neither competent nor interested in teaching.

Research has also established the effect of school schedules and the allocation of time on teachers' work and attitudes (Corbett et al. 1984). The amounts of time allowed for staff development, for personal contact with students and for lesson preparation all significantly impact what teachers do in the classroom. For instance, the teacher's ability to construct relevant curricula and to develop an adequate understanding of student needs is clearly constrained by their time and skills. Studies indicate that most teachers closely follow textbooks, whether prescribed by districts or not (e.g. McNeil 1988). Certainly, texts and standardized course materials are useful tools for teachers. However, as Gitlin (1983) has argued, this disengagement with the construction of courses can be a form of disempowerment; in this case, teachers become technicians whose task is dictated by prefabricated packages on which they depend (see also Bullough et al. 1988).

In sum, while it is true that teachers usually work alone in their

individual classrooms and with apparent discretion, they do so only within narrowly circumscribed limits. There is a great deal of evidence to suggest that schools are highly bureaucratized settings in which the discretion and authority of subordinate groups such as teachers are strongly delimited by the hierarchical division of labor. This is not to deny variations in the behavior of teachers, but as the above examples illustrate, these are primarily of style not substance. School delegation may not require elaborate mechanisms of accountability because, by definition, little of substance is delegated. In such cases, the use of relatively crude and direct levers is obviated because of this prior less-obtrusive structuring. As a result, the delegation of specialized, standardized tasks delimits, rather than increases uncertainties for administrators and thus neutralizes the effects of any employee non-compliance.

This finding is highly consistent with studies of control done across a range of types of organizations. For instance, critical analysts of the labor process in industrial settings have insightfully shown how dividing work processes into stages, accompanied by the delegation of responsibility for specific fragments to particular employees acts as a multifaceted means of control. By dividing conception from implementation, and authority from responsibility, the division of labor not only circumscribes employees, but deskills them. Deskilled workers are more easily replaced workers - providing a further means of maintaining the concentration of power at the level of management (e.g. Braverman 1974; Edwards 1979).

The bureaucratization of teachers' work provides an analogous case. By creating numerous similarly subdivided teaching positions - the "egg crate" model of bureaucracy - the organization lessens its dependence on any single

teacher and therefore lessens the power of the faculty in general.

This second form of constraint goes a long way towards illustrating how control may be achieved in schools. Internal organizational bureaucratization, however, is not a fool-proof mechanism. Since the seminal studies of the "informal" organization, and of the salience of organization members' norms, generations of researchers have substantiated the limits of bureaucratization and important role of employee culture in the issue of control. This role is the subject of the next section.

C. Unobtrusive Controls

In theory, teachers' belief systems and the organizational culture of school faculties are especially likely to be a major factors in the success or failure of organizational control. Indeed, the observation that the technology of teaching is not amenable to bureaucratization is the basis of both the loose coupling perspective and the empowerment view. In order to achieve organizational control of intangible and indeterminate activities, such as teaching, analysts of power have argued that organizations must rely on unobtrusive means, whereby employees themselves restrict the range of alternatives (e.g. Perrow 1986, p. 130; Ouchi 1977; Simpson 1985). However, the existence and success of such internal normative mechanisms are difficult to discern. In organizational settings characterized by normative controls, the mechanisms used to insure conformity are usually taken for granted by respondents and may not be readily apparent to researchers (Etzioni 1961). The question here is: what is the normative culture of teaching and is it a source of resistance or acquiescence to the hierarchical structure of schools, a source of conflict or consent?

Traditionally, studies of the occupational culture of teachers have

largely supported the loose coupling view of schools. Typically, such research has begun with the observation by Waller that schools are really small societies composed of three primary groups - students, administrators and teachers - with divergent and contradictory needs and interests. Each forms a subculture at cross purposes with the expectations and ends of the others. The resulting structural cleavages, in this view, generate a divided, unsupportive and competitive culture and climate in schools (Waller 1932; Becker 1953; Bidwell 1965; Lortie 1969, 1973, 1975, 1977; Dreeben 1973, 1976).

The role of teachers, caught between the contradictory demands of an unsympathetic administration and the students, who resist and resent their efforts, parallels that of the classic "man in the middle" (Whyte and Gardner 1945). Like plant foremen, teachers are responsible for and dependent on reliable motivation and performance from their students. Similar to other kinds of "people work," the "technology" of the teaching occupation thus demands flexibility, give and take, and making exceptions. But these needs inevitably clash with administrative demands for rationalization, uniformity and control. According to this view, in order to allow "production" to proceed, it thus becomes necessary for administrators to allow a limited teacher discretion and autonomy - hence, looseness - over classroom instruction to generate cooperation and motivation in both staff and students. As a result of these structural conditions and of an indeterminate technology, the direction of the teacher's focus necessarily lies inward to their classrooms. This focus is enhanced by teachers' relative spatial isolation in segregated classrooms, further segmenting collegial relations and consequently weakening organizational coordination. The resulting occupational orientation of teachers, according to this tradition, is characterized by extreme

individualism, commitment to the organization and acceptance of the manner in which schools are organized. Hence, in the loose coupling view, teacher culture is one of consent not conflict, of commitment not challenge.

There are good reasons, however, to consider an alternative interpretation of this portrait of the culture of teachers. Although the loose coupling view holds that consent and compliance by teachers is a voluntary choice, there is evidence suggesting it is actually a subtle mechanism of organizational control.

Students of power argue that the validity of either interpretation is an empirical question requiring one to show that the subordinates in question would act differently if they had the opportunity, but are prevented from doing so by identifiable mechanisms of constraint (Frey 1971, 1985; Lukes 1974; Gaventa 1980; Hartsock 1985). They suggest that one method by which such questions may be tested is by examining settings where such premises are absent or where there are points of breakdown of the normative order. That is, do teachers act differently in situations in which the individualized ideology and the structure of power which it supports are challenged or absent?

The contending positions within the current school reform movement provide one such test case. Until recently the prevailing view - quite consistent with the loose coupling perspective - has been that schools, especially those in the public sector, are hopelessly uncoordinated and poorly controlled. Successful reform, this view has thus argued, must focus on more rigorous training in schools of education, greater accountability in the schools, stringent top-down state controls and a general "tightening of the ship" (Rosenholtz 1985; Goodlad 1985; Weis et al. 1989). The appearance of

the newer view that schools are already tightly controlled and must be "restructured" by increasing "teacher empowerment" through "school-based management" has widened the margins of debate and, as I have described earlier, begun to challenge the assumptions embedded in the loose coupling perspective. It offers evidence suggesting that teachers, despite apparent acquiescence, have actually not been in agreement with the traditional structure of schools and if given the opportunity would prefer an alternative form of organization (e.g. Bacharach et al. 1988). In other words, it lends support to the argument that the widespread acceptance of the structure of schools has been a form of unobtrusive power, rather than consent. Indeed, it suggests that the "consensus" that exists is both imposed and taken-for-granted.

But, if it is true that teachers favor the newer disempowerment view of schools and support structural reform, how has the prevailing hierarchy for so long remained unchallenged?

Ironically, institutional theory provides the means to understand how intraorganizational control and order can exist in the absence of obvious indicators and without serious challenge. Institutionalization occurs when processes and patterns become structured into legitimate forms and can be characterized as a variable ranging from totally taken-for-granted to totally negotiated situations (Zucker 1977). A major insight of the institutionalists is to point out the influence of such institutions far beyond their overt and direct effects; such structuration involves the construction and legitimization of rules and roles, that once established, are reproduced by the weight of precedent alone. As such, people and organizations replicate and conform to such patterns, rather than rationally and consciously plot out

alternatives, in a manner akin to March and Simon's "performance programs" (1958; Simon 1957). Organization members' thought and behavior are controlled, in this view, by organizational vocabularies and proper communication channels that limit information, set up expectations, provide foci and curtail the search for alternatives. In sum, these patterns become naturalized and serve to invisibly coordinate ostensibly decoupled activities and consequently, the hierarchical roles of teacher, administrator and student become taken-for-granted institutions.

Hence, institutionalization can potentially make invisible, natural and unobtrusive the forms and degrees of control and power present. There is a second overlapping sense, however, in which unobtrusive control may operate; not only is the hierarchical structure taken for granted, it can also be obscured. One of the more insightful examples of this is Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) discussion of how the role of schools in the reproduction of inequality is masked through the misrecognition of such hierarchic social relations, by the production of rationalizations and in unconscious self censorship.

Occupational socialization in schools of education provides an illustration of this institutionalization and mystification of teachers' subordinate role. The ideology of professionalism, promoted in teacher training programs, does not question the claims of loose coupling but effectively justifies it as a necessary decentralization allowing professional autonomy and individual accountability. Threats to the normative order can also be bolstered by selective recruitment in schools. Researchers have found that school systems screen candidates as to their consistency with school goals, procedures and standards and use recruitment as an important means for

controlling staff performance (Bidwell 1965; Zeigler and Peak 1970).

Research has also illustrated the role of school committees in maintenance of the status quo. It is common for schools to coopt teachers' time, competence and cooperation in after-hours meetings. Such committees are usually of an advisory status (Bidwell 1965; Corcoran et al. 1988). Consequently, rather than decentralizing authority relations, such forms of delegation, precisely because they do appear as employee input, can actually function to inexpensively maintain centralized control.

Perhaps the most effective mechanism of unobtrusive control, however, arises from the nature of the teaching labor process itself. The non-routine and complex character of teaching provides a potential point of vulnerability in administrative efforts at bureaucratic control. The loose coupling view may be correct in pointing out that schools must grant some degree of latitude to teachers. In fact, it is because of the necessity of such de-routinization, that "work to rule" strikes by teachers' unions are conceivable. But this potential source of independence can be turned to quite opposite uses. Burawoy's (1979) discussion of "making out" in the case of blue collar employees and Edward's (1979) analysis of bureaucratic controls throughout industry provide illustrations of how this process works. In each example, groups embedded in a hierarchy of power relations are neither rigidly controlled agents of their superordinates nor autonomous actors. They are relatively autonomous and in carrying out the internal imperatives of their position they unwittingly serve to reinforce the power of superordinate groups.

There is some evidence to suggest that such mechanisms of control do operate in schools. For instance, detailed ethnographies have shown how,

caught between the imperatives of the bureaucracy and the needs of adolescents, the teaching task becomes a balancing act in which rationalized rules and roles are themselves negotiated and socially constructed (Cicourel and Kitsuse 1963; Cicourel et al. 1974; Mehan 1978). The objective of the teacher becomes the accomplishment of control over uncertainties generated by an organizational structure over which they have little control. Ironically, in diligently bending the rules and devising manipulative strategies in order to meet the internal demands inherent to their organizational position, teachers struggle to maintain the same organizational structure that denies them the power, autonomy and resources to adequately accomplish their task in the first place.

Thus, by delegating a limited "discretion" and "relative autonomy" to teachers, it is possible for administrators to both gain employee commitment, thwart challenges and divest responsibility for student performance. Notably, as I showed in the foregoing section, this division of labor involves the delegation of responsibility, not real decision-making power. As in Selznick's classic discussion (1949, pp. 259-261), such cooptation serves to increase the legitimacy and control of power holders.

This third form of control, that of unobtrusive mechanisms, provides a further illustration of how control can operate in schools. Schools may exhibit an apparent absence of coupling because the rules and roles comprising the hierarchical division of labor have become so taken for granted and so obscured they are invisible. Thus challenge becomes literally unthinkable. Hence, these institutionalized belief systems serve to invisibly coordinate ostensibly decoupled activities. Such "consensual" social control is just what loose coupling accounts overlook.

4. Conclusion

The foregoing section has attempted to map the mechanisms of faculty control in schools. I have shown that a great deal of evidence undermines post-rationalist claims that schools are loosely coupled organizations and that teachers are autonomous employees little affected by the actions of administrators. These claims result from three unexamined assumptions underlying such research, which effectively preclude the discovery of a range of possible forms of control and power in school organizations. Measures of bureaucracy, coupling and control are, I have argued, contingent. Such assessments depend on where one looks, by what criteria one evaluates them and how one conceptualizes them. In contrast to traditional school research, when we examine the social functions of schools, look beyond oversimplified notions of bureaucracy and take into account a range of possible mechanisms of control, schools appear to be quite tightly coupled organizations.

However, simply countering the loose coupling perspective with an opposite label for schools - as tightly coupled organizations - is also far too simplistic. It is important to carefully distinguish among the different components and characteristics of organizational order. In this analysis, I have examined only one component of organizational coupling - control. My assumption has been that the distributions of power, influence and control are crucial and salient variables. But because schools have a highly centralized organizational structure does not imply, of course, that they are otherwise exemplars of machine-like, coupled, efficient and rational organizations. In fact, students of power in organizations tell us that the concentration of influence often has an inverse relationship with other organizational linkages such as consensus, commitment and communication (e.g. Tannenbaum et al. 1974;

Hackman and Oldham 1980; Kanter 1977; Whyte and Blasi 1981; Perrow 1986). In other words, a high degree of centralization in organizations may tend to promote divisiveness and conflict and inhibit sharing among members. To the extent that the processes of teaching and learning require collegiality and cooperation, such a centralized hierarchy, while it may promote efficiency in some areas, will be inefficient for these functions. This, of course, is a point made repeatedly over the years by critics of school organization (e.g. Dewey 1902; Waller 1932; Silberman 1970; Goodlad 1985; Shanker 1989).

Acknowledging the complexity of the relationship among different types of linkages within organizations reveals the extent to which the loose coupling vocabulary confounds many of the diverse components of intraorganizational order (i.e. interdependence, coordination, control) and masks their interrelationships. Such an acknowledgment also undermines the oversimple stereotype, implicitly supported by the loose coupling perspective, that distinguishes the purportedly efficient private sector from the presumably inefficient public sector. Careful delineation of these relationships may be able to provide an alternative explanation of the anomaly of loosely coupled systems by showing how some forms of organizational tightness cause other forms of organizational looseness.

Necessary now is more systematic and detailed investigation into the questions of to what degree, in regard to which organizational tasks, under what conditions, in which organizations and with what consequences, which forms of tight and loose coupling hold. Schools are an important starting point because they are a theoretically significant case within organization theory; they have been a puzzling anomaly. It is precisely because of this that schools are an ideal site with which to rethink and revisit the basic

theoretical framework by which organization theorists have examined coupling and control in general. Moreover, my analysis has shown that there are compelling reasons to do so. For, if schools, usually assumed to be extremes in looseness, are in significant ways tightly controlled organizations, the degree of decoupling in other kinds of organizations is thrown into question as well. It is to this larger paradigm that I now turn.

Ironically, for all their criticisms of traditional rational models, the loose coupling perspective shares with them a number of fundamental notions about the behavior and structure of organizations. This perspective does not question traditional assumptions of rational organizational life so much as react to them by depicting those organizations in which an overall common rationality apparently does not exist. Nevertheless, underlying their argument is a Hobbesian view of social order as rational exchange and utilitarian interaction. Rational theorists all assume organizational life, whether the conscious pursuit of self interest or not, to be composed of atomized free agents and use the concept of efficiency as both a desirable end state and an explanatory variable (Salaman 1978). Such a view derives from the neo-classical dichotomy between rational and non-rational which defines the former in narrowly economic terms and the latter in presumably sociological terms.

This thinking is an example of what Granovetter (1985) describes as an underembedded account of social action. In not finding organizational rationality such researchers presume the absence of overall social order altogether. Any slippage between rationality and reality constitutes a failure. What results is a search for explanations of this supposed disorder and strategies for managing its existence. But that schools, for instance,

maintain such internal consistency and stability as they do, points to the efficacy of other sources of coupling and structure. By focussing on non-rationalities, looseness, dissensus and lack of standardization, analysts overlook the enormous similarities in school organizations (cf. Parsons 1959; Silberman 1970). What they miss is social order so taken for granted that its import is not recognized as a variable.

The assumptions of rationality stand in contrast to the embeddedness thesis - a long-standing theme within sociology (e.g. Durkheim 1933; Polanyi 1944; Granovetter 1985; Swedberg 1987). Durkheim, for instance, called attention to the precontractual underpinnings to rationality and exchange and argued that the latter are both historically situated moral orders like any other. It is the social relations in which behavior is embedded that loose coupling and rational theorists alike, underemphasize. In this instance, both ignore that a model of rationality is just that. As such, it is a social construct and a metaphor (Morgan 1980).

To be sure, institutionalists, if not other loose coupling analysts, have emphasized the normative context of schools and view it as a source of the organizational structure of schools. They specifically suggest this as an alternative explanation to task-oriented theories of structure. In fact, institutional theory is widely recognized as a sophisticated attempt to construct a contemporary theory of organization that transcends traditional rationalistic explanations of organization structure by describing the relationships among organizations and their social environments (Zucker 1987, 1988). These scholars, however, in reacting to narrowly rational models of organization, go to the other extreme. Their cultural and sociological approach is an example of what Wrong (1961) and Granovetter (1985) describe as

an oversocialized conception; interorganizational consensus and organizational structure are the result of an unproblematic reproduction of social norms. Oversocialized perspectives, although antithetical to undersocialized conceptions, are also fundamentally underembedded accounts. That is, they assume an atomized view of social life and miss underlying social organization. They underemphasize, at the intraorganizational and micro-level, power networks, patterns of behavior and processes of internal structuration. My argument is not that loose coupling analysts are rational theorists. Indeed, they explicitly offer their theoretical framework as an alternative to such traditional rational models of organization. My argument is that they reproduce elements of rational models, whether they intend to or not.

In fact, the three key assumptions underlying the loose coupling perspective, upon which I have focussed, are examples of this. The first assumption concerns the definition of school goals and purposes. The near universal concern with instruction and, by extension, its measurement by standardized tests, represents a rationalistic view of schools. This underemphasizes the institutional and social character of schools by translating issues of social control into ostensibly technical and value-free activities.

The second assumption concerns the criteria by which schools are judged. The idea that schools should be judged in comparison to the machine model also betrays a rationalistic and technical orientation. By framing such evaluations in the vocabulary of rationality and efficiency, this comparison obscures the underlying interests and values at stake.

Finally, the loose coupling perspectives' adherence to an underembedded

account leads to a third shortcoming - the neglect of the underlying social organization of power. Again, this is ironic given this perspectives' emphasis on pluralism, dissensus, politics and the differing values of individuals and groups who must negotiate and compromise. In this view, organizations, composed of actors whose divergent needs and values compete, need to insure the cooperation and adjustment of all in the attempt to achieve consensus. Organization structure thus is both a source of differentiation of interests and a mechanism for mediating differences.

However, this represents an example of what political scientists such as Frey (1971, 1985), Lukes (1974), Gaventa (1980), and Hartsock (1985) have insightfully criticized as a pluralistic account of power. In their view, such accounts overly focus on direct controls, explicit decision making and observable conflicts. These models sever actors from their social contexts by treating them as individual rational agents. By emphasizing the ambiguities and dissensus in organizational life, pluralists underemphasize the underlying realities of ownership and control which shape visible behaviors and neglect to examine institutional, cultural, structural and indirect forms of power and the attendant suppression of conflict.

In sum, my contention is that the loose coupling perspective has offered an incomplete and faulty view of the organization of schools. This faulty view, I have maintained, has resulted from the unexamined assumptions underlying such research. These assumptions, ironically enough, are straight out of traditional rational theories of organization. It is the resulting underembedded framework, which underemphasizes the social organization and institutional character of organizations, that is responsible for the anomaly of loosely coupled organizations.

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